CLAIM AMENDMENTS/
CLAIM LISTING

Claims 1-22 (Canceled)

23. (Withdrawn - Currently amended) A method of joining a pair of foam core panels,

where each panel has a vertical edge face adapted to be engaged by the edge face of the other panel, and each of the vertical edge faces has a vertical slot formed in the respective edge faces thereof, and the bottoms of said slots are undercut to define retaining surfaces, and

said panels are to be interconnected by a joining member having a relatively thin central portion and opposed retaining surfaces at its opposite side for engagement with the undercut surfaces of said slots,

comprising the steps of

mounting one of said panels on an overhead support,

disposing a joining member in the undercut slot of said one panel, with a portion the joining member projecting outwardly from the vertical edge face thereof,

securing a leveler plate ~~leveler~~ on the top of said one panel to thereby capture said joining member in the slot thereof, said leveler plate ~~leveler~~ being mounted so as to project beyond the vertical edge face of said one plate,

positioning the other panel below the mounted panel with its vertical edge face

aligned with the vertical edge face of the mounted panel,

displacing said other panel upwardly into engagement with the leveler plate ~~leveler~~ to capture the outwardly projecting portion of the joining member in the vertical slot of said other panel,

securing the other panel to the overhead support, and

securing the other panel to the leveler plate ~~leveler~~.

24. (Currently amended) A method of joining foam core panels as in claim 59 ~~23~~ wherein

said panels each comprise a top rail, and

the step of securing the one panel to the overhead support comprises threading at least one screw through the overhead support and into the top rail of the one panel,

the step of securing the other panel to the overhead support comprises threading at least one screw through the overhead support and into the top rail of the other panel, and

the steps of securing the leveler plate to the one panel and to the other panel comprise threading screws into the top rail of said one panel ~~plate~~ and into the top rail of said other panel, ~~plate,~~ respectively.

25. (Currently amended) The method of joining foam core panels as in claim 59 ~~23~~, wherein

the step of securing the leveler plate ~~leveler~~ to the one panel is performed after the

step of inserting the joining member into the slot of the one panel and before the step of mounting the one panel on the overhead support.

26. (Currently amended) A method of joining foam core panels as in claim 59 ~~23~~ wherein

said one panel further comprises a bottom rail and the slot in said panel extends from the top of the panel and terminates at the bottom rail, and

comprising the further step of disassembling the panels so joined, by means of the following steps,

unsecuring said other panel from the overhead support,

unsecuring said other panel from the leveler plate ~~leveler~~, and

displacing said other panel downwardly to withdraw the joining member from the slot in said other panel ~~slot~~, as downward frictional forces on the joining member are resisted by the bottom rail of the one panel.

Claims 27, 28 (Cancelled)

29. (Withdrawn) A method of joining foam core panels,

where each panel has a vertical edge face adapted to be engaged by the edge face of the other panel, and each of the vertical edge faces has a vertical slot formed in the respective edge faces thereof, and at least the lower and upper end portions of the bottoms of said slots are undercut to define retaining surfaces,

comprising the steps of

inserting a joining member into the lower end portion of the slot in one of said panels, said joining member have a retaining surface engageable with the undercut surface of the portion of the slot into which it is inserted, said joining member also projecting outwardly from the vertical edge face of said one panel,

inserting an alignment strip into the slot in said one panel, said alignment strip being disposed above said joining member and having a portion of uniform thickness projecting beyond the edge face of said one panel,

positioning the other of said panels with its edge face in opposed, spaced relationship from the vertical edge face of said one panel, and with the lower end of the other panel above the upper end of the joining member projecting from the one panel,

displacing the other panel toward the one panel, to bring their vertical edge faces into engagement and simultaneously introduce the alignment strip into the vertical slot of the other panel,

after the edge faces are engaged, displacing the other panel downwardly to capture the joining member in the lower end portion of the vertical slot in the other panel, said joining member having second positioning surfaces which are thereby engaged with the undercut retaining surfaces of the slot in the other panel, and

inserting a second joining member in the upper end portions of the slots of the two panels, said second joining member having opposed retaining surfaces which are thereby engaged with the undercut portions of the slots.

Cancel claim 30.

31. (Currently amended) A method of customizing foam core panels as in claim 61 ~~30~~, wherein

the removing step is performed through the use of a portable, electrically powered saw, and

the step of forming a slot is performed through the use of a portable, electrically powered router,

whereby the customizing can be done on the installation job site.

32. (Currently amended) A method of customizing foam core panels as in claim 61 ~~31~~, wherein

the step of forming said longitudinal slot comprises

a first pass with a straight router bit to form the outer portion of said slot, and

a second pass with a router bit with forms the undercut portion of said slot.

33. (Currently amended) An assembly of foam core panels comprising a pair of panels in joined relation wherein

each panel comprises

a foam slab of foamed plastic material having opposed lateral surfaces spaced apart by the thickness of the slab,

the lateral surfaces of the panel being defined at least in part by the

lateral surfaces of the slab, and

veneers, respectively bonded to the lateral surfaces of the panel,

said panels having, respectively, abutting surfaces of foamed material in engaged relation with each other; and

means for joining said panels with said abutting surfaces held in engaged relation, characterized in that the joining means comprise

slots formed, respectively, in said foam slabs, said slots extending inwardly from said abutting surfaces,

each slot being undercut to form retaining surfaces facing away from the abutting surface in which it is formed, and

a joining member inserted into said slots,

said joining member having retaining surfaces respectively engaging the retaining surfaces of said slots,

thereby maintaining the panels in joined relation with said abutting surfaces maintained in abutting engaged relation.

34. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33 wherein each abutting surface comprises a side edge face of the panel defined by said slab and the veneers secured thereto;

35. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33, wherein

said panels have a rectangular configuration and are vertically disposed, and further wherein

each of said panels further comprises a top rail overlying said slab and coextensive with the top surface thereof and a bottom rail underlying said slab and coextensive with the bottom surface thereof,

disposed, and

the joining means further comprise

undercut slots formed in said top and bottom rails as continuations of the undercut slots in said foam slab, and the joining member extends into the undercut slots formed in said top and bottom rails,

whereby the forces imposed on the foam slabs in maintaining the panels in joined relation are minimized.

36. (Currently amended) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 35 ~~3~~ further characterized in that

the outer veneers disposed on opposite side faces of the core are also coextensive with the side faces of the top and bottom rails,

and further wherein

the top rails of the joined panels form a first set of rails and the bottom rails of the joined panels form a second set of rails, and further wherein the ends of the undercut slots in one set of rails extend from the slab to a horizontal surface of said one set of rails, and

further wherein a veneer is secured to each of said horizontal surfaces of said one set of rails,

thereby concealing the ends of the slots in said one set of rails from view.

37. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 36 wherein

means are provided in at least one of said top rails for connecting the panels to an overhead support; and

said one set of rails are bottom rails.

38. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33 further characterized in that

the slots extending inwardly from the abutting faces of the panels, extend inwardly at right angles thereto, and

the bottoms of the slots are undercut to form said slot retaining surfaces.

39. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 38 wherein

the joining member has

a relatively narrow, central web which is snugly received by the portions of the T-shaped slots adjacent the abutting surfaces, and

thickened outer ends at its opposite ends, on which the retaining surfaces of the joining member are formed.

40. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 34 wherein said panels have a rectangular configuration and are vertically disposed, and further wherein

the panels are angularly disposed, one relative to the other,

the abutting surfaces are mitered to compositely define the angled relation between the panels, and

the portions of the slots adjacent the abutting surfaces are aligned and

the joining member has a central web which is snugly received by the portions of the slots which are adjacent the abutting surfaces.

41. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 40 wherein the outer end portions of the slots are aligned and

the bottom portions of the slots are tapered toward each other from the widest portions of the retaining surfaces, thereby minimizing the material removed in forming said slots.

42. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 34 wherein said panels have a rectangular configuration and are vertically disposed, and further wherein

the panels are angular disposed one relative to the other,

the abutting surfaces are mitered to compositely define the angled relation between the panels, and

the portions of the slots adjacent to the abutting surfaces are angularly disposed to each other and the

the joining member has a central web which is angled to be received by outer portions of the slots.

43. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33 wherein

an angled camming surface is provided on the joining member at one end thereof, said camming surface being adapted to draw said panels toward each other when the joining member is slid lengthwise into said slots, as the panels are being joined.

44. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33 wherein

the volume of material in the joining member is minimized by passageway means extending longitudinally thereof.

45. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam care panels as in claim 33 wherein the volume of material in the joining member is minimized by the retaining surfaces thereof being defined by longitudinally extending, thin walled portions.

46. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 45 wherein

the joining member comprises

a longitudinally extending, relatively thin, solid, central section and longitudinally extending, thin walled portions at the opposite sides of the central section,

the thin wall sections extend outwardly from the planes of the opposite sides of the central section, to define the said retaining surfaces and then are angled, on opposite sides of the central section away from the central section and toward each other.

47. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33 wherein the panels are angularly disposed one to the other,

one of said abutting surfaces comprises a side edge face of one of said panels as defined by the slab thereof and the veneers secured thereto;

the other vertical abutting surface is comprises a portion of the lateral surface the other panel.

48. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33, wherein set slots comprise a first set of slots and

the means for joining the panels further comprise

a second set of slots formed, respectively, in said foam slabs generally parallel to the first set of slots,

said second set of slots comprising second slots extending inwardly from said

abutting surfaces thereof,

each second slots being undercut to form retaining surfaces facing away from the abutting surface in which it is formed, and

a second joining member inserted into said second slots,

said second joining member having retaining surfaces respectively engaging the retaining surfaces of said second slots.

49. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 48, wherein the second joining member has the same cross section as the first mentioned joining member.

50. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33, wherein the retaining surfaces of the slot are defined by a solid resinous polymer material.

Cancel 51.

52. (Currently amended) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33, which forms a valance, said assembly further comprising

means for mounting each of said pair of panels from overhead support means and

a leveler plate ~~leveler~~ secured to the top surfaces of the joined panels and providing the primary means for horizontally aligning the panels thereby providing an accurate horizontal alignment, therebetween, irrespective of any horizontal misalignment in the means for mounting said panels from the overhead support means.

53. (Currently amended) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 52, wherein each panel comprises a top rail which

is engaged by the means for mounting the panels from the overhead support means, and

to which the leveler plate ~~leveler~~ is secured.

54. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 53 wherein at least one of said panels has a bottom rail,

the slot in said one panel extends through the top rail, downwardly through the foam core and terminates at the top of the bottom rail,

whereby, when the assembly is dismantled, the one panel may remain mounted, and the other panel may be lowered to disengage it from said one panel, and the bottom rail resists the downward force on the joining member during such removal.

55. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 33, wherein said panels have a rectangular configuration and are vertically disposed, and further wherein

the panels have a substantial height,

the joining member is disposed in the lower end portions of said slots, and further comprising

an alignment strip disposed in said slots above said joining member, said alignment

strip having a thickness approximating the width of the slots adjacent the abutting surfaces to thereby maintain the panels in aligned relation, and

a second joining member disposed in the upper end portions of said slots, said second joining member having retaining surfaces respectively engaging the retaining surfaces of at the upper end portions of said slots, thereby maintaining the upper end portions of the panels in joined relation.

56. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 55, wherein the upper surfaces of the panels are recessed and

the upper end portion of the upper joining member is dispose in said recess, and

the upper end portion of the upper joining member has a finger grip for facilitating its removal in disassembling said joined panels.

57. (Previously presented) An assembly of foam core panels as in claim 55, wherein each of said panels further comprises a top rail and a bottom rail for providing structural integrity to the panels.

58. (New) A method of forming an assembly of foam core panels comprising a pair of panels in joined relation wherein

each panel comprises

a foam slab of foamed plastic material having opposed lateral surfaces spaced

apart by the thickness of the slab,

veneers, respectively bonded to the opposed lateral surfaces of the slab and coextensive therewith;

characterized in that

each panel has a side edge surface defined by the thickness of the slab and by the side edges of the veneers that are bonded to that slab, and

adapted to be brought into abutting relation with the side edge surface of the other panel; and

each panel has slots formed, respectively, in said foam slabs, said slots extending inwardly from said abutting surfaces,

each slot being undercut to form retaining surfaces facing away from the edge surface in which it is formed,

said method comprising the steps of

bringing the two panels into an assembled relation with said side edge surfaces in abutting relation and

and connecting the two panels in assembled relation by introducing a joining member into said slots so as to bring retaining surfaces on said joining member into engagement with the undercut, retaining surfaces on the respective panels.

59. (New) A method of forming an assembly of foam core panels as in claim 58 wherein

the abuttable surfaces and the slots therein are vertically disposed, and

comprising the further steps of

first mounting one of said panels on an overhead support,

disposing the joining member in the undercut slot of said one panel, with a portion the joining member projecting outwardly from the vertical side edge surface thereof,

securing a leveler plate on the top of said one panel to thereby capture said joining member in the slot thereof, said leveler plate being mounted so as to project beyond the vertical side edge surface of said one panel,

positioning the other panel below the mounted panel with its vertical edge face aligned with the vertical side edge surface of the mounted panel,

displacing said other panel upwardly into engagement with the leveler plate to capture the outwardly projecting portion of the joining member in the vertical slot of said other panel,

thereby bringing the two panels into an assembled relation and introducing a joining member into said slots,

and the further steps of

securing the other panel to the overhead support, and

securing the other panel to the leveler plate.

60. (New) A method of forming an assembly of foam core panels as in claim 58 wherein the abuttable surfaces and the slots therein are vertically disposed, and

at least the lower and upper end portions of the bottoms of said slots are undercut to define retaining surfaces, and

comprising the further steps of

inserting a joining member into the lower end portion of the slot in one of said panels, said joining member projecting outwardly from the vertical edge face of said one panel,

inserting alignment strip into the slot in said one panel, said alignment strip being disposed above said joining member and having a portion of uniform thickness projecting beyond the edge surface of said one panel,

positioning the other of said panels with its side edge surface in opposed, spaced relationship from the vertical side edge surface of said one panel, and with the lower end of the other panel above the upper end of the joining member projecting from the one panel,

displacing the other panel toward the one panel, to bring their vertical side edge surfaces into engagement and simultaneously introduce the alignment strip into the vertical slot of the other panel,

after the side edge surfaces are engaged, displacing the other panel downwardly to capture the joining member in the lower end portion of the vertical slot in the other panel, and

inserting a second joining member in the upper end portions of the slots of the two panels, said second joining member having opposed retaining surfaces which are thereby engaged with the undercut portions of the slots.

61. (New) A method of forming an assembly of foam core panels as in claim 58 wherein it is necessary that a portion of a panel be removed to provide a desired panel length, comprising the further steps, performed prior to joining the panels, of

marking one of the foam core panelsl to indicate the portion of the panel that must be removed to provide a desired panel length for a given installation,

removing the portion of the panel required to provide a desired panel length, and in so doing providing a freshly cut side edge surface on the panel, and

forming an undercut slot longitudinally of said freshly cut edge face.

62. (New) A method of forming an assembly of foam core panels as in claim 58 where if is desired to provide wear resistant surfaces for said undercut slots,

said method including the further steps of

providing a liner of plastic polymer material having plastic memory, said liner being formed with an outline that corresponds to the outline of the slot, but is angularly divergent relative thereto,

coating the outer surface portions of the liner with an adhesive,

forcing said liner through the opening of said slot to the bottom thereof in a fashion that enables the plastic memory of the polymer material to bring the adhesive coated surfaces of the liner into engagement with the surfaces of the slot,

whereby a solid resinous polymer, wear resistant retaining surface is provided for the slot.